

## Natick Select Board

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## Town of Natick • Select Board Office

March 8, 2023

Ethan Lapointe  
Program Manager, TIP  
Central Transportation Planning Staff  
Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization  
10 Park Plaza, Room 2150  
Boston, MA 02116

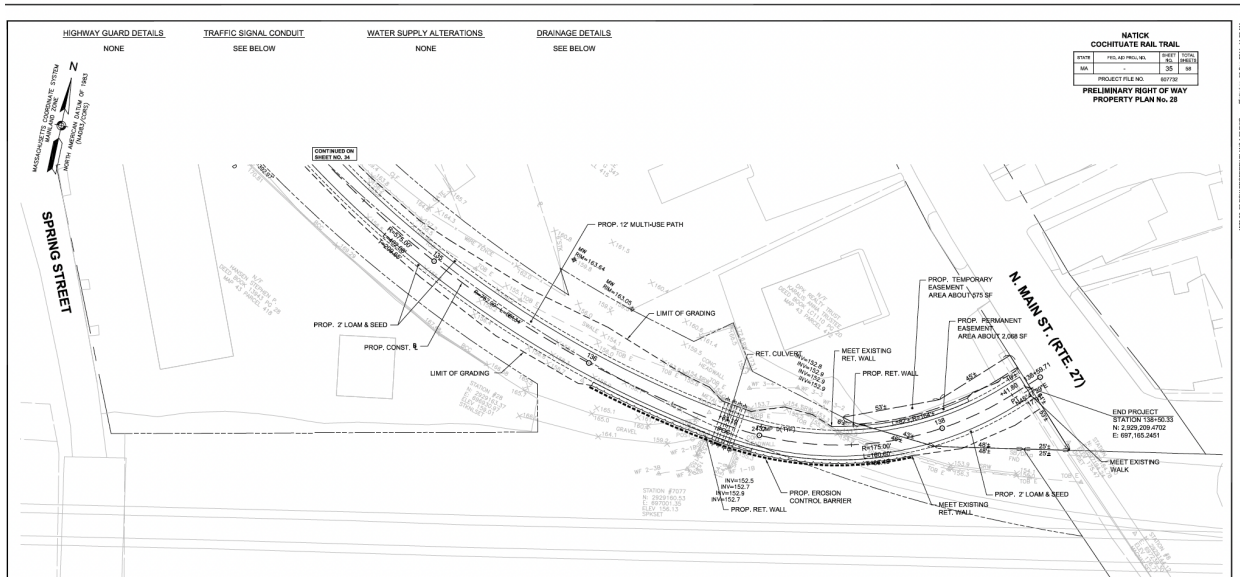
### **Support for MassDOT project 610691, CRT Extension to Natick Center**

Dear Mr. Lapointe:

On behalf of the Town of Natick, I am writing to strongly encourage the approval of the Natick Center Extension to the Cochituate Rail Trail, MassDOT project 610691, by the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization for when you next consider amendments to the Transportation Improvement Plan for FY 2024-2028.

For some historical context, a direct connection to Main Street in Natick Center was part of the original 25% plans for the Cochituate Rail Trail in 2014. When the MBTA approved funding for design for the new Natick Center MBTA Station, the Town temporarily scaled back the CRT both to accommodate the MBTA station rehabilitation project design process, and to ensure that the MBTA and its contractors had use of the Saxonville Branch right of way in order to service a drainage improvement project and to construct the station, but with the expectation that the CRT would ultimately connect to Natick Center. Once the Town acquired the right of way from CSX in 2016, we promptly concluded an agreement with the MBTA to provide them with access for these purposes.

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Original CRT 25% Design Submission, 2014

The case for connecting the CRT directly to Natick Center is even more compelling today than in 2014.

Changing development and transportation patterns have made a safe active transportation corridor increasingly important to our region, with considerable residential development along the CRT, and redevelopment from retail to lab space, residential and mixed use. The profile of abutters to the CRT has also evolved, and one of Natick's signature employers, The MathWorks, operates a corporate bikeshare program to connect their two campuses using the CRT.

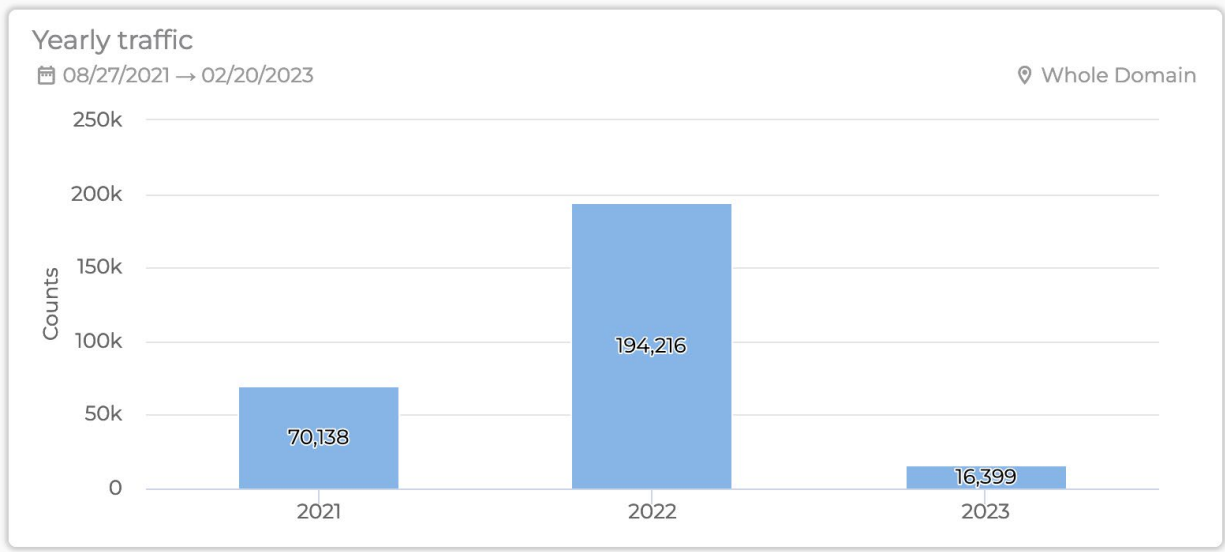
The Town's recently adopted Master Plan, Natick 2030+, envisions smart growth such as mixed use and multifamily housing adjacent to transit, and a comprehensive walking and biking network. Natick is seeking ways to encourage active transportation to provide healthy, car-free mobility to address roadway congestion, air and water quality, and public health.

In fact, the Town was fortunate to fund the design costs for this project with grants from the MetroWest Health Foundation and MassTrails, among other sources. We recognize the importance of the CRT and other accessible trails to the health and well-being of residents and visitors, including seniors and people with mobility limitations.

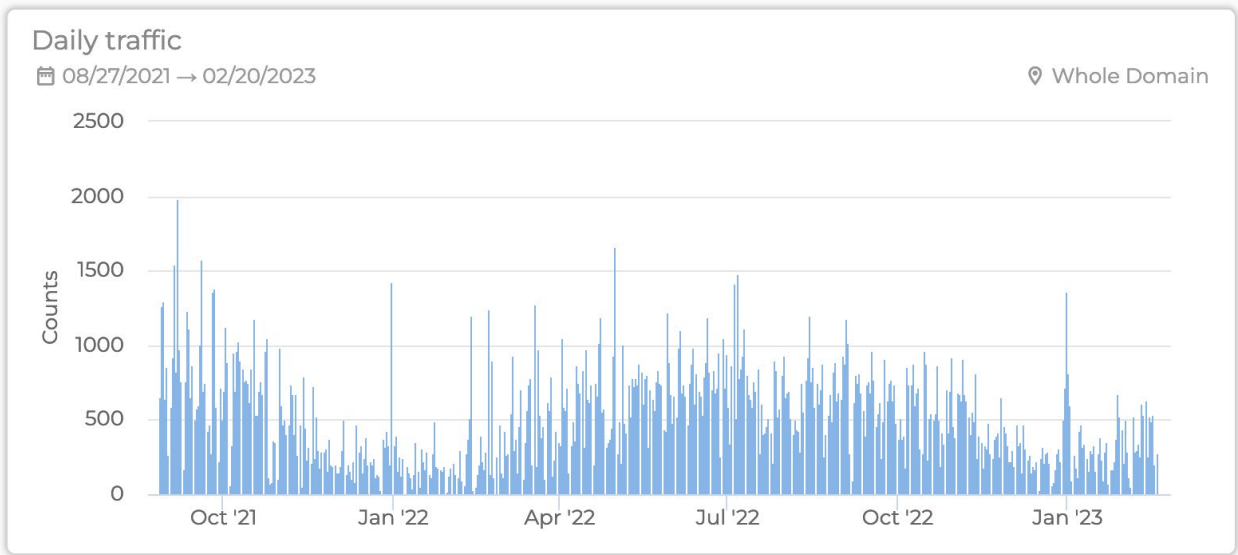
The Town is also continuing its support for residential and economic development in Natick Center, with housing production, a thriving cultural district, continued incentives to commercial investment, and transportation improvements. While we have for twenty years had mixed-use zoning and a high density overlay district, and recently rezoned the area adjacent to this project to encourage greater density, while we are also working within the framework of the MBTA Communities legislation to fulfill the Town's obligation to address our regional housing shortage.

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These measures help to ensure that the trail will be heavily used. Even today, the CRT is very popular, with over almost 300,000 users since its August 2021 opening. 1500 to 2000 daily users are not uncommon. In partnership with MAPC, we have deployed a traffic counter on the trail, and regularly track usage.



Annual users, August 2021-February 2023



Daily users, August 2021-February 2023

Natick recognizes that the MPO has many worthy projects seeking federal funding, and we are hopeful that this project will be approved for TIP funding such that MassDOT can advertise and award a contract soon after the upcoming completion of the MBTA station project.

Ethan Lapointe, Program Manager, TIP  
March 8, 2023

Thank you very much for your favorable consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul R. Joseph, Chair

cc: Senate President Karen E. Spilka  
State Representative David P. Linsky  
U.S. Representative Katherine M. Clark  
Barry Lorion, MassDOT District 3 Director